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Comparison of design studio and jury systems in architectural schools in southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

Examination of architectural design is given prominence in schools of architecture because it is considered as the bedrock of architecture profession. In many Nigerian architectural schools, the jury system is used to examine the students' architectural design studio projects. However, it is observed that the system has applied in various schools may be prone to subjectivisms and variations of the jurors. The aim of this paper is to critically examine the jury system as applied in two schools of architecture located in southwest Nigeria. While one school is domiciled in a government owned university, the other is located in a privately owned university. Data is based on analysis of relevant documents, observation of jury assessment processes and group discussions with staff and students. Result revealed that jury processes in the schools showed more similarities rather than differences. Furthermore, the jury system also aids in the teaching and learning of students. The paper concludes that to improve learning dynamics in architectural design studio, learning environments must incorporate diverse delivery and jury assessment modes that retort to student learning styles.

Keywords: architecture, design studio, jury assessment, Nigeria.

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1. Introduction

Architecture is distinguished from other disciplines being one anchored on apprenticeship. Architecture education with apprenticeship based training method has existed from long ago (Hassanpour, Utaberta, Abdullah, Spalie, & Tahir, 2011).

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Just like the theatre is synonymous to apprenticeship of a medical student, (Oh, Ishizaki, Gross, & Yi-Luen Do, 2013). identified that the design studio lies at the heart of architectural education. In the same vein, (Cowdroy, & Williams, 2006). noted that design studio worldwide was typical of all architectural programmes which was based on an integrated problem-based learning (IPBL) approach developed from our medical school’s very successful problem-based learning (PBL) (cognitive apprenticeship) medical education programme. The design studio is at the heart of most industrial design curricula and is a place where students learn to visualise and represent aspects of a problem graphically and to think as a designer (Green & Bonollo, 2003). Furthermore, architecture curriculum as affirmed by Utaberta, Hassanpour and Bahar (2012) is based on design studio. In addition, architecture design studio was identified as an environment that creates a context where active learning occurs through group or individual problem-based projects. Thus, a casual review of any university architecture curriculum according to Oh, Ishizaki, Gross and Yi-Luen Do (2013) will reveal that the studio is the central activity in every architecture student’s life. Apart from the fact that students devote tremendous amount of time and academic energy into their studio learning Oh, Ishizaki, Gross and Yi-Luen Do (2013), many students actually spend most of their time in the design studio, where they work, study, eat, and even sleep (Adeyemi,2012; Anthony, 1991). Thus, the need to subject budding architects to the rigours and strains of practice even during studio assessment is deemed necessary. This is facilitated by the jury system of assessment which in early times, was found most suitable being an interactive and communicative evaluation tool amongst design students, instructors and jurors (Lackney, 1999).

2. Statement of Problem

Traditionally, over the years, the jury system has been a medium and assessment tool for students’ work in most schools of architecture all over the world. Unfortunately, this foremost mode of learning is being questioned today in light of significant changes in: society, professional practice of architecture, higher education and learning environments (Crowther, 2010). Studies find the jury system as a critic centred event that coerces students into conforming to hegemonic notions of habitus and as profoundly demotivating and competitive (Webster, 2006; 2007). Though Brown, (1999) opined that the jury system of assessment provides feedback and motivation to students with respect to their performance and while certifying achieved standards (via grades) for accountability and accreditation reasons, studies such as Mitgang, (1999) and Wilkin, (2000) have found it a deficient mode of assessment as it is biased and no longer aligned with the expectations of students or the needs of society (Milliner, 2000). A study conducted by Cowdroy and Williams, (2006) further underscored the subjectivism and variations that characterize jury assessment of creative works. The findings include: inability of jurors to satisfactorily explain the difference between criteria for Fail and Pass; jurors inability to define specific criteria for assessment of creative ability; amongst others. On this premise, this paper attempted to elicit feedback from students of two selected architectural schools in South West Nigeria with a bid to compare the design studio and jury systems in training and assessment of creative design studio works of future professionals.

3. Methodology

Critical evaluation of design studio and jury sessions of two selected schools of architecture in southwest Nigeria were observed in the 2011/212 and 2012/2013 academic sessions for comparison based on pedagogy, culture and environment parameters. The two selected schools of architecture were Covenant University, Ota (CU) and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, (OAU) both located in southwest Nigeria. Data was obtained from the students as the basic unit of analysis (130 and 115) respectively making a total population of 245 through administration of questionnaires and group discussions. Data obtained was analysed using descriptive analysis. Parametric measurements were quantitatively and qualitatively done in terms of content analysis.

4. Results and Discussions

Three key factors that were derived from the component loading for comparison of design studio and jury systems in these schools were: jury elicits useful advice from critics; jury objectives and assessment parameters, and jury purpose and prospects.

4.1. Jury elicits useful advice from critics

Generally, out of the four schools of architecture studied, two selected schools agreed that the most significant index about jury assessment system was that 'jury elicits useful advice from critics'. Table 1 adapted from Aderonmu, (2013) show that majority of students of CU (57.7%) and OAU (62.6%) agreed that jury elicits useful advice from critics. It suggests that when students understood jury system from this view point, more would be willing to participate in the jury assessment. This key variable emphasized jury as a medium of learning and its organization and setting develops more confidence in design abilities. These notions were further established in focus group interviews conducted among design studio students in the selected schools. The group discussion took place immediately after jury presentation in each of the selected schools and its purpose was to capture the fresh essences of their jury experiences.

Table 1. Jury elicits useful advice from critics

University	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Rarely disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
UNILAG	1(0.9)	11(10.0)	57(51.8)	34(30.9)	7(6.4)	110(100.0)
OAU	2(1.7)	3(2.6)	38(33.0)	48(41.7)	24(20.9)	115(100.0)
CU	12(9.2)	20(15.4)	23(17.7)	53(40.8)	22(16.9)	130(100.0)
LAUTECH	4(3.2)	24(19.0)	22(17.5)	71(56.3)	5(4.0)	126(100.0)
Total	19(4.0)	58(12.1)	140(29.1)	206(42.8)	58(12.1)	481(100.0)

The view of CU students can be summarized as thus: *"the entire jury process opened us to a lot of new ideas especially in the aspect of merging lots of disciplines and functions into one. A CU student emphasized that "the jury was a whole new experience which provide the opportunity to be able to defend my work confidently and also expressed my ideas in words". On the other hand, OAU students believed that the jury process provided them the opportunity to "learn quite well that one's building design is supposed to satisfy the needs of its users in all areas". It can be summarized that the students from the selected schools viewed the jury system as an opportunity to learn new ideas from their jurors which contacts in design studio may not avail. In this regard, the jurors need to display a good knowledge before the students and assist to mould their thoughts into feasible product of architectural design.*

4.2. Jury objectives and assessment parameters

Result showed that design projects given to architecture students in the selected schools have its learning objectives and hence assessment parameters. Thus, jury objectives and assessment parameters vary in the schools and from one juror to another. For instance, CU operates a modular design system which covers all aspect of building typologies namely industrial design module, urban design module, housing design module and institutional and complex building module. Interview with teachers in CU revealed that the module system was adopted with the primary objective of ensuring the robustness of the future professional in all aspects of building design typologies. By the module system therefore, students within the same level are divided into the four modules. The grouping of students into modules is changed in a cyclic manner in each semester to ensure that they pass through each of the modules at least once throughout their undergraduate schooling experience. It must be pointed out that the module system is operated from 300 level. Conversely, design projects given to students in OAU was not based on the module system but also designed with primary objective of ensuring that students have an all-round experience of all building design typologies. The four building typologies are similar to the module system operated in CU. However, the typologies are distributed across semesters from 300 to 400 level in which all students within the same level take the same design typology per semester till they graduate. Result showed that despite variations in the operational system of design projects in the two schools, there were similarities in the jury objectives and the assessment parameters. For instance, 200 level design studios in the two schools are similar in the sense that students are introduced into basic architectural design with a simple residential design of “my dream house”. Jury systems in the two schools are also similar. There is a pre-jury and a final jury. The pre-jury assesses the design processes (pencil work) of the students while the final jury assesses the final product of the design (inked work).

4.3. Jury purpose and prospects

Result of the study identified jury prospects as one of the key factors in design studio and jury assessment. Results from a group discussion with students in the two schools on their expectations from jury assessment revealed a cross-section of similar opinions. The key issues that cut across the two schools are discussed as follows:

- Over-flogging of weaknesses rather than potentials in students design: Majority of students in the two schools claimed that jurors while guiding students to develop the design scheme, oftentimes over flogged the weaknesses than the potentials that were hidden in the students design.
- Destructive criticisms: Students claimed that some jurors criticized destructively such that students’ interest in furthering design development is lost. Furthermore, the students in the two schools believed that this act perhaps may be responsible for eventual loss of hope to become an architect by some students.
- Ambiguity in parameters for grading and assessment of design studio works: Group discussion with students showed a consensus view that students most times did not know their jurors parameters for grading and assessment. The students are of the view that oftentimes, grading and jury assessment is based on the jurors’ subjectivity and design preferences rather than on the quality of the design product.
- Variations in design preferences of jurors: Student identified this gap as a major problem in jury assessment system because their jurors are usually not their design instructors. For instance, a 400 level student in CU noted that “*the problem is that, during jury, the juror would ask us to change the design concept but when we returned to our module instructors, they refer us back to the brief as contrary to the advice of the jurors*”.

- Inflexibility of jurors: Students said that some tutors are inflexible in their approach to design issues. Students noted that such jurors are very hard to convince of a design solution, as they perceive that it does not comply with their thinking and approach to sorting out the design problem. Thus they are unwilling to help the student. They would rather ask the student to change the design scheme to something that they are willing to negotiate. Some tutors are also unable to discover the innovative aspects in the student's design and thus to invest in developing the design scheme. They insist on their own ideas and when a student represents his innovative ideas to them, they hesitate to accept them.

5. Conclusion

The paper recognized the relevance of jury system in the assessment of design studio creative works of future professionals. For this reason, the study compared the jury system in two selected schools of architecture in southwest Nigeria. The study revealed that beyond a means of assessment of design studio creative works, the jury system also aids in the teaching and learning of students. Thus, there are a lot of inherent but inexhaustible opportunities for learning and teaching in architectural design jury assessment system. In the same vein, the jury assessment system provides a context for critical analysis of the studio design project, in addition to providing a broad learning opportunity for both students and staff. More similarities were also found in the design studio processes in the two schools rather than differences. The paper concludes that to improve learning dynamics in architectural design studio, learning environments must incorporate diverse delivery and assessment modes that retort to student learning styles in terms of proper articulation of jury purpose, objectives and assessment parameters. This supports the view of Crowther, 2010 who posited that assessments must seek to align activities and learning outcomes with assessment tasks to better accommodate diverse student learning styles and backgrounds. Group discussion with students also revealed that students follow their design studio tutor's opinion not because it is convincing and rational but because the tutor has a substantial input in the jury assessment.

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